

economy as one of the five least corrupt in Asia; and Freedom House labeled Taiwan "free" in 2003 with an improvement in political rights since 2002. President Chen Shui-bian has also demonstrated a commitment to human rights and is credited with solidifying a place for human rights within Taiwanese society during his presidency. The Human Rights Advisory Committee, established by Chen in 2000, is currently in the process of creating a National Human Rights Commission that will serve as the highest institution in Taiwan for the protection and promotion of human rights.

I remain committed to protecting the civil and political rights of the people of Taiwan, and I support Taiwan's inclusion in international organizations, such as in the World Health Organization, WHO. The recent SARS and avian flu outbreaks highlight the importance of giving the people of Taiwan a voice in these organizations. I agree with claims by Taiwanese authorities that it is inhumane for the international community to deny the people of Taiwan access to WHO's medical data and assistance. Unfortunately, despite congressional efforts, Taiwan has still not been granted observer status. This should change in the coming year.

I fear that provocative statements will have dangerous repercussions in this region of the world. Rather than warn and provoke, I hope that the governments of China and Taiwan will engage in a more constructive dialogue and encourage increased cross-strait people to people linkages. I support a peaceful resolution to the Taiwan-China situation, and I will continue to support policies that keep cross-strait tensions in check.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2003

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. On May 1, 2003, Senator KENNEDY and I introduced the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act, a bill that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable to our society.

Last fall in Portland, ME, Joshua Nisbet pulled up in a car near a bar that caters to the gay community. Nisbet and a friend yelled an antigay slur at two men walking nearby and assaulted them.

I believe that Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law we can change hearts and minds as well.

PETER VLČKO, HUMANITARIAN

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I note with sadness the passing of Peter

Vlčko, a hero for all of humanity. When immense love and bravery coalesce in one person, as they did in Mr. Vlčko, amazing things are bound to happen.

And they did.

Mr. Vlčko's love for humankind manifested itself in his brave fight against evils such as totalitarianism, fascism, and anti-Semitism. During the dark days of World War II, at huge and constant risk to his own life, he fought against the pro-German Slovak Government and rescued over 20 Jews from deportation and death by the Nazis.

His heroic efforts have not gone unnoticed. Among other awards and recognitions, in 1981, Mr. Vlčko received the Silver Medal for Righteous Gentiles from Israel. With descendants of the Jews he saved looking on, he stood witness as a tree was planted in his honor at the top of a hill in Jerusalem. His name has also been forever memorialized in a large granite relief in the Garden of the Righteous at the Holocaust Memorial center in West Bloomfield.

Born in a Slovak village in 1912, Mr. Vlčko volunteered for military service immediately upon completion of his secondary education. He rose quickly through the ranks until the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia by the German military in 1939 forced him to be disarmed and reassigned to a war college in Bratislava. He took a break from his studies to serve a tour of duty on the Russian front, but his service was cut short when he sustained shrapnel wounds and an injury to his left leg from the heavy mortar fire. Returning to his studies, he met his future wife, Georgina Reichsfeld.

The strict anti-Semitic laws could not deter his love for Georgina, who was of Jewish ancestry. At a risk to Mr. Vlčko's life, the two entered into wedlock.

As the danger to his young bride and her family mounted, he hid them until he could obtain false identification papers. His perilous efforts did not stop with his bride's family. He continued on, obtaining false papers for twenty other Jews, which identified them as "essential personnel," preventing certain deportation and death.

Summoning more courage still, Mr. Vlčko offered his assistance to an attempt to overthrow the Nazi-friendly regime in Slovakia. Through a variety of disguises, such as a shoemaker and a woman, Mr. Vlčko managed to evade German forces and twice to escape capture. Forced into hiding for the remainder of the war, he was separated from his family for a year when he escaped into Bavaria.

Once reunited, Mr. Vlčko and his family immigrated to the United States, where they began a new life in Michigan. After attending a community college, he went to work for Ford Motor Company.

His new surroundings, however, could not make him forget his violent past. Through his narrative, he tried to edu-

cate people on the horrors of fascism and anti-Semitism. To do so, he both lectured throughout the United States and Canada and published an 860-page autobiography. People needed to know and, thanks to him, we do.

In 1991, Mr. Vlčko was granted honorary Israeli citizenship, and both he and his wife regained their Czechoslovakia citizenship, which was taken from them when they fled Czechoslovakia after the Communists seized power in the 1948 coup. In fact, he had been living under a death sentence issued by the Czech government until 1989. He has been honored by the Czech President and Czech Minister of Defense and has often been the guest of honor of the Czech and Slovak Ambassadors to the United States.

Mr. Vlčko is survived by his wife, Georgina, and their four children. Despite what severe images a background as a soldier might evoke, his wife affectionately describes the full picture: "He loved his family very much and worked his whole life to keep them safe."

Mr. Vlčko left behind more than a family, however; he left behind a legacy of love and hope embodied in the children of the Jews he saved and an outstanding example of courage and decency in the face of darkness and tyranny.

It is that legacy that I am sure will surround him as he rests in peace.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

HONORING THE SERVICE OF BRENDA COWAN

• Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, today I would like to take the opportunity to honor the service of Ms. Brenda Cowan, originally of Sturgis, KY. Her death while performing her duty as a firefighter is a great loss to us all.

On February 13, 2004 Brenda was responding to a domestic violence call. Tragically, Brenda and the person she was trying to help were shot and killed while waiting for police to arrive on the scene.

Her service with the Lexington, KY fire department was exemplary and duly appreciated. Brenda was also a pioneer. She was the first African American woman to become a firefighter in Lexington. As one of the U.S. Senators from Kentucky, I know that Brenda served as a fine example of what it means to serve one's community.

We are humbled and honored by the sacrifice Brenda has made. Without men and women such as Brenda, America would not be as great as it is now. Lexington and Kentucky are truly lucky to have benefited from her fine service. She is an example to us all. •

HONORING SY AND ESTELLE OPPER

• Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I am pleased to note that Sy and Estelle